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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the role of speech in the development of control of cognitive processes, with particular attention paid to the nature of bilingualism. It is stated that exposure to a second language provides a way of overcoming the encapsulation of the mind that develops when an individual is exposed to only one language. In order to understand the phenomenon of bilingualism, it is necessary to adopt a historical perspective and to note what has changed and developed in the lifetime of both a group and an individual. There is a need to explain how it is that two languages interact so that a new kind of consciousness is the outcome. In considering bilingualism, three central questions are: (1) What is consciousness? (2) How did it come about? (3) What are the particular understandings of a given cultural group and what is that individual's experience within that cultural group? These questions are discussed in light of Bain's work on the nature of human consciousness. (CLK)

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Bilingual Consciousness

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This article was produced as a requirement for the course "Psychology of Bilingualism" offered by Dr. Bruce Bain of the University of Alberta (October 1975).

In the process of developing into a mature thinker, feeler, and understander of reality, we are exposed to a certain type of language experience. Regrettably, the language experience to which the individual is exposed has inherent restrictions in it.

To be sure, any one language is, by its very nature, restricted, as it were, because there are only so many cultural, physical and emotional experiences which any one language has had during its evolution. Language, contrary to the erroneous notion of many, has such a profound effect on transforming us from a sensory motor organism into a thinking adult that what we come to do is "think" in terms of a language experience to which we have been exposed.

Therefore, the language to which we are exposed tends to encapsulate our mind and, as a result, it tends to shut off alternatives. Moreover, since any single linguistic history is arbitrary, the unilingual individual becomes a victim of a particular tyranny.

Thus, the crucial question arises: "Is there a major way of getting around this encapsulation of

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the mind which limits or prohibits a personal emancipation?" Although it would be rather naive to expect any other answer than "yes" to this question, it is astounding to learn how many individuals — lay people and, unfortunately, educators too — are not fully convinced of the benefits of active participation in alternate world views, although they often enough pay lip-service to this tenet of educational objective. By so doing, through extended biased argument, this practical motive for the efficient study of other languages has been degraded to a mere platitudinal 'intellectual toy' which either is being kicked back-and-forth or simply ignored.

Exposing ourselves to another kind of symbol system, namely to another language, in my view, will result in the suggested 'personal emancipation.'

Bergson makes the point that, for people to maximize their clan vital, their spontaneity, their internal potential, they need — they literally need — a more flexible symbol system. They simply need a more flexible means of trying to come to grips with reality.

Also, Dr. Bruce Bain appears to be convinced that, for the individual to develop into a mature adult, he needs more than one language at his disposal. He needs a second language, or preferably a variety of languages, in order to achieve the level of contemplative perception, where action is giving way in favour of inspection, judgment, analysis, and distantiation — in contrast to participation, where we respond organismically to the dynamic, affective, physiognomic properties of the environment, which is the immature version in this concept.

Thus, there seems to be solid evidence that suggests that maturity is not available to the typical unilingual individual; and the nature of the human organism is such that maturity will not occur if the only means which one has available is a restricted code.

Out of the juxtaposition of the two ways, or more than two ways, of looking at a problem, in other words, through the medium of two or more different languages, we tend to gain a greater perception of the reality in and of itself. Let us think of it as being something like the process of dialectics — the art of critical examination into truth of opinion, investigation of truth by discussion, logical disputation or

criticism dealing with metaphysical contradictions and their solution (I am thinking in this context of the Hegelian stages of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis which we could see as the process of thought development from a certain beginning to a certain completion). It follows that if the only tool which we possess is a singular language tool with which to encode and decode, that is to say, to think, to conceive, to perceive, to understand, to express ourselves, to act and to re-act, then we are naturally cut off, or automatically cut off, from alternate ways of addressing ourselves to that problem.

What we require is another medium for addressing ourselves to the same problem, and out of the juxtaposition of the two ways of looking at the same problem, we tend to grasp a clearer, fuller, and more dimensional picture of things as they are in the universe.

Although the suggested 'other medium concept' appears on the surface to be rather simple, it is in fact exactly the opposite: it is an intricate, complex problem. And the question arises: "What can we do, or what must we do, in order to understand it more fully?" A logical suggestion would be to break it down and then re-integrate it again.

As a result, the first problem to be discussed in this context must be that of the human organisms in their environmental interaction. But to really come to grips with the problem, we have to define various postulates, such as, "What constitutes this organism?" We have to examine the question: "What does this organism come from, in evolution?" We must investigate his needs in terms of an environment in the process of his growing up. Another basic question which calls for analysis and reflexion is this: What accounts for the spontaneity which is inside the organism which grows and changes and develops from what it was to begin with, namely the sensory organism to what it has become or to what it will become, namely the adult thinker and feeler?

There seems to be a real difference between animal and human communication, and yet there appears to be continuity between them at the same time.

Beneviste clarifies and explains the basic difference between animals and humans, when he says:

The essential difference between animal communication and human communication can be stated summarily in one phrase: Animal language is not a symbol language. It is a signal code. All animal communication systems are characterized by a code: the fixity of the subject matter, the invariability of the message, the impossibility of separating the components of the message and its unilateral transmission. Human communication, on the other hand, is symbolic or mediated occurring in an open (ended) system of communication (B. Bain, Lecture Notes).

Beneviste's statement leads us to the important point, namely that we learn speech in the process of dialoguing (dia: two; logos: word, in Greek) with someone else. In other words, while we are growing up, as very young children, we begin to learn about the world around us in the form of a dialogue. On the one hand, the dialogue precedes the actual use of speech, and on the other hand, speech refines and cultivates in turn the said dialogue. The communication between the mother and her new-born child, for example, is a pre-speech type of dialogue. That communication of interaction becomes more refined, more sophisticated, more developed, by the use of a specific type of sign, a specific type of tool, namely the speech-tool.

Although much research appears to have taken place in the area of unilingual speech development in the child, studies of the nature of the bilingual sign seem to be relatively smaller in number, although they are generally of an exceptionally high calibre in terms of quality. They pose a particularly interesting challenge to the curious mind: What happens in this process when an individual, instead of using a uni(lingual)sign, employs a bi(lingual)sign? Would it not follow that he can be more specific and refined in his communication process because of the two-way sign which he has at his disposal, in contrast to the one-way sign or 'one-way-track' of the unilingual?

In order to find a rational answer to this question and to other crucial issues of bi-lingualism, we must focus our attention on the role of speech in the development of the control of cognitive processes and how they relate to consciousness. And I think that to understand how we internalize, how we ingest, how we

interiorize a system so that we can voluntarily control our logical reasoning or consciousness, is crucial to the understanding of human development. Speech, in this context, is meant to refer simultaneously to the unilingual speech as well as to the multilingual speech.

Any contemplation of the phenomenon of speech leads us directly and automatically to the consideration of the historical recapitulation in human development because both are an integral part of one another which cannot be separated from the entity as a whole. The point which I want to make is that any one speech phenomenon which we use has a long, long history behind it. And what happens when we start to grow up in any one cultural community and acquire a certain way of designating a particular way of perceiving, a certain way of 'cognizing' reality? In fact, what we are doing is recapitulating the history of that event. In other words, when we are learning to speak, we are not just learning speech sounds. We are learning a whole cultural history which is inherent in that particular way of talk. Thus, in a sense, in a rather loose sense, to be sure, we are recapitulating history — a history not of a decade or of a century, but one which must be as old as mankind itself, perhaps millions, or even billions, of years. It could be rather difficult for many of us, I like to believe, to vision ourselves as the end-product, as it were, the very end of that long historical interlinking chain; and we become in turn part of that history as we pass on the language to the next generation.

Thus, to understand the bilingual phenomena, we have to adopt a historical perspective: We have to note how things have developed and changed, both in the life-time of a group of people as well as within the life-time of an individual person. For this reason, bilingual studies are very historically-oriented studies, in the sense of the methodology, namely by looking at how a certain phenomenon arises in history and subsequently how the child internalizes that phenomenon in his own development.

What becomes of crucial importance in any analysis of bilingualism, then, is to realize that we

are looking at history in its broadest possible understanding: We try to focus at the history of philogenesis; we become concerned with the history of sociogenesis; and we look at the history of individual people who grow up in such a context.

In order to understand how two languages interact with each other, so that a new kind of consciousness is the outcome, we have to understand how consciousness comes into being. Attempting to grasp the idea of how consciousness comes into being puts us immediately into the framework of looking at animal development and at human development, which, to some extent, has been done previously above. Although it is comparatively easy to find out what animals can do and what humans can do, it becomes much more difficult to analyze why there is no consciousness in animals and why there is consciousness in people.

We must look at how a society has grown, changed and altered. We have to scrutinize the sociogenesis or the development of any individual society. We must find out what is important to that society and what is relatively immaterial to it. And lastly, it is of crucial significance to learn how an individual grows up in a society, whereby two social experiences or three social experiences combine, so that there becomes a new type of consciousness in that particular individual. Whenever we are thinking of a bi-lingual act, it becomes necessary to consider these three entities almost simultaneously: we have to think of (a) what is consciousness? (b) how did it come about? (c) what are the particular understandings of a given cultural group and what is that individual person's experience within that cultural group. The way in which I propose we go about doing it is by elaborating on a general thesis, originally formulated by B. Bain, "General Theses in Quest of a New Kind of Consciousness".

The fundamental distinction between humans and animals, but moreover our human-ness in and by itself, independent of the concept of animal-ness, is the development and the use of language. Aristotle recognized this idea about 2,000 years ago and put it forward for posterity in this way:

Language distinguishes man from animal. Our whole capacity of being truly human is implicit

in language. Truth is only possible in language or, at least, by means of language. Even a lie presupposes language. Language is an organon which comes into use as a means of coming to terms with the experience occurring between self and the surrounding world and between the mind's intercourse with itself. (B. Bain, Lecture Notes)

It is perhaps perplexing to note that such a profound statement had been formulated already so many years ago; and it is even more astounding to see that it has direct relevance to our present predicament and to future times. This insight into human nature was preserved, mostly in a dormant state, over the years, when it was picked up during the last century by philosophy and brought into formal psychology, that is to say, in the sciences, since the Second World War.

What Aristotle expresses in his fundamental statement is that we are not born human, but that we become human through language. We become a human being and, moreover, we develop a consciousness through a language. He becomes somewhat 'flowery' when he uses the term "truth"; at least, that is what we think it is, because we see it through the biased view of our present culture, whereas today we would use the term "knowledge" or "cognition", but in his time, to be sure, the other term was used instead. This is only possible in language or by means of language. There is no truth or falsity, no-knowledge or non-knowledge, in the animal kingdom; there is only behavior. We attain knowledge if we reach truth through study by means of language, with language being the tool. Thus, language becomes the organon. It is a tool which comes into use as a means of coming to terms with the environment for us to grapple with what is being said, with what is being written, and so on. It also comes into use between the mind's intercourse with itself. Again, we might consider this to be a 'flowery' term and what we would say today is that when a person is talking to himself that he uses language. So, on the one hand, language is the tool used by the individual with his surrounding environment and, on the other hand, it comes into use when he goes to communicate his whole understanding. By language here, obviously, we do not just mean verbal noises. Instead, we are talking about a means of coming to understand the surrounding world, including the self which is part of the universe.

If that is language, then language itself has to be viewed within the context of the general law of human development. This, I think, appears to be the point which Vygotsky is making in his following tenet, namely:

We might formulate the general law of human development as follows: Any function in the child's human development appears on the stage twice, on two planes: first, on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First among people as an intermental category, and then within the child as an intra-mental category. (B. Bain, Lecture Notes)

The emphasis on the importance of history in connection with language seems to gain in clarity when we look at the problem from Vygotsky's point of view. According to his dictum, any function, thought, behavior, idea, or any aspect of human consciousness, for that matter, appears on the human stage twice; in other words, anything which you do, or which I do, or which anyone else does, appears on the stage twice. It appears on the historical stage; for example, the development of the words which we use to describe our experiences have already appeared in history on the social plane, because history is a social phenomenon; it is a history of 'real' people who have de facto lived at one given period in time or another. Moreover, in the development of an individual person on the psychological plane, he in turn internalizes the experiences which are inherent in language. Since then, in Aristotle's terms, he comes to understand the surrounding environment and also he comes to understand himself. In this way, looking at the problem from Vygotsky's point of view, it is fair to say that indeed any phenomenon of experience, no matter what it is, appears on the stage twice: historically, or in a social context, and subsequently in a psychological context.

What you and I are is something which we have become through originally interacting with social experience or historical experience, and re-shaping it or re-modelling it in our own image, in our own understanding. In this view, even a creative act always has a social origin, but nothing is totally new in our consciousness. There seems to be always some aspect of it which can be traced to the history of that particular language in which we have grown up. Thus, any

one language automatically puts blinkers on a person because, if we come to understand the surrounding world, we are coming to understand ourselves, through a 'kind of framework', through a 'kind of net', a kind of historical experience of one people; and this is automatically restrictive, because no one people has experienced everything.

Therefore, when we come to develop ourselves psychologically, a single-language tool automatically restricts us in the development of our psyche and our logic, namely in our consciousness. This does not necessarily mean that this is bad, because some languages are more global or universal than others. But, nevertheless, they have restrictions in themselves, regardless of how or what we consider any particular language to be.

Dr. Bain brings together brilliantly the postulates made by Aristotle and adds dimension to them: he makes the strong point that "we are not simply providing a more flexible 'organon' or more elastic means of coming to terms with experience (when we become bilingual or multilingual), but that we are also fostering a new kind of intra-mental category, 'a new kind of man'." This newly-formulated concept for the development of a "new kind of man" seems to contain an incredible potential for the improvement of both the individual and our world, the capability of an unforeseeable magnitude, provided that it were more fully understood, particularly by educators and also that it were implemented on a larger scale.

It is my view that there is nothing more important in our world today — personal tragedies are to be excepted from this statement — in terms of crucial issues which face mankind than the trying to understand the nature of human consciousness, and the best tool for understanding human consciousness that we have is through language studies in general and bilingual studies in particular. Humboldt puts the paramount influence of language into the right perspective when he dynamically states: "The influence of language extends over everything man thinks or feels, decides and achieves. It transforms the world into a possession of the mind." When we look around us in our world today, we can see all kinds of problems facing people, from individuals who are unable to pay their rent, to the

great global systems which are about to conquer the planet earth and even outer space. There are great struggles going on, indeed, for the understanding of man's mind and for man's consciousness; and the outcome of the next fifty or hundred years is very much dependent upon the fact of who will most fully understand and improve the nature of human consciousness.

What are the implications of these insights and concerns for education? They suggest, and I think it is the most reasonable and viable hypothesis, that we, as educators, must recognize the crucial issues which are at stake. We must acquaint ourselves without delay with the latest, pertinent research findings and the formulated theories which are evolving from researchers who lead in the field of human consciousness. But becoming impressed by the overwhelming challenge which confronts us is obviously not enough: we must act, we must use our intellectual potential to inspire in our students a renewed burning desire for second language study, and also foster that new kind of intra-mental development, in order to educate a whole new generation to become "a new kind of person."

Since language teaching includes some of the most complex problems in the field of education, we must also attempt to analyze them for those who are concerned with their solution, namely other teachers, principals, school inspectors and supervisors, the local authorities and, last-but-not-least, the parents of our students.

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